

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Valley Junior High School
4195 South 3200 West
West Valley City, Utah 84119**

March 29-30, 2006



**Utah State Office of Education
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Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Valley Junior High School
4195 South 3200 West
West Valley City, Utah 84119**

March 29-30, 2006

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 29-30, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Valley Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Bill Kenley is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Valley Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Valley Junior High School.

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State Superintendent
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VALLEY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Marty Frustaci Assistant Principal

Counseling

Char Packard Counselor
James Babcock Counselor

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VALLEY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

We work as a community, to create a supportive environment, in which we collaborate and provide students with the opportunity to acquire the values, academic skills, and character traits necessary to lead a productive life.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process and they are able to apply their learning in a meaningful way.
- Instructional practices and student assessments should provide students with a variety of learning opportunities and a variety of ways to demonstrate their achievement.
- Students learn to make appropriate decisions given a supportive, safe, and challenging learning environment.
- Teachers, administrators, parents, and the community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission and promoting learning opportunities for all.
- The school must value and support all students and be committed to continuous improvement.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Dr. John Goldhardt, Snow Canyon Middle School, Washington County School District, Visiting Team Chairperson.

Janette Davenport, Timberline Middle School, Alpine School District

Nancy Garrison, Timberline Middle School, Alpine School District

Brian DeVries, Oquirrh Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Judy Olson, Millcreek Junior High School, Davis School District

David Tanner, Millcreek Junior High School, Davis School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

VALLEY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Valley Jr. High School has served the students of West Valley city for nearly 60 years. When it was built, it served all the West Valley area, formerly known as Granger and Hunter. The school mascot, the Liger, was chosen for Shasta, the world's first known Liger, who was at Utah's Hogle Zoo at the time Valley Junior High opened. Valley Junior High has had many teachers who have stayed at the school for their entire careers. Many school and district leaders began as teachers or administrators at Valley as well. During the last five years, several staff members have retired who served for 30+ years at the school. These changes have brought younger teachers who have added to the perspective of the staff. The school also has a tradition of teacher leadership, with many teachers serving as leaders over curriculum, activities, and school discipline policies.

The Valley Junior High boundaries have remained unchanged for many years, and it is not unusual for second- and third-generation Valley students to attend the school. At one time the Valley neighborhoods were considered the most stable of the West Valley junior high school, but that is no longer the case. During the past year there was a 41 percent transience rate, and the number of diversified learners has steadily increased.

With the recent school closures in Granite School District, the Granite Board of Education realigned the Valley Junior High boundaries so that all of the students who attend there will attend Granger High School (previously, a portion of Valley Junior High's students attended Taylorsville High School). This boundary will bring new opportunities to Valley, including more diversity and more low-income families.

Over the years Valley Junior High has also had a tradition of providing students with co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, including Academic Games, MESA, basketball, volleyball, track and field, soccer, intramurals, Peer Leadership Team, and Community of Caring.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The profile provided the school with several important findings. The data indicated that while academic improvement has increased, it has been on a plateau with no increases for a few years. It also showed that in the 7th and 8th grades, where students are "teamed," academic achievement is higher. Overall, students in the 9th grade do much worse than the rest of the school. In addition, the analysis also provided the school with data to show that the number of transient students has doubled over the last five years, and that there have been significant increases

in the number of ELL students, ethnic minority students, and students from poverty.

- b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The school needs to look beyond CRT test scores for data. It is also important to analyze and utilize formative content assessments as well as disaggregated grading and attendance data.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Include grading data disaggregated by gender, race, income level, and ELL and special education status.
- Include attendance data disaggregated by gender, race, income level, and ELL and special education status.
- Include discipline data disaggregated by gender, race, income level, and ELL and special education status.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The Visiting Team was convinced that this process was completed in an inclusive and collaborative manner. Parents, students, and teachers all participated in the process. In fact, a student was instrumental in writing the mission statement (based upon what the staff, parents, and students felt should be the mission of the school).

During the self-study the school gained a new principal and a key member of the leadership team passed away. The Visiting Team was impressed with how the process continued and how others “picked up the ball” and led the process to completion.

- b) *To what extent does the school’s self-study accurately reflect the school’s current strengths and limitations?*

The self-study provides an honest and accurate profile of the school. The school included both good and bad data, knowing that this data was important in the

overall success of the school. Indeed, the school provided an accurate portrayal of its reality so that it could then focus on the future and work toward the school's ideals.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Valley Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

Effective Communicators

1. Students will communicate with clarity, purpose, and understanding of audience.
2. Students will integrate the use of a variety of communication forms and use a wide variety of communication skills.
3. Students will recognize and evaluate various forms of communication.

Responsible Citizens

1. Students will take responsibility for personal actions, act ethically, and demonstrate honesty, fairness, integrity, and respect.
2. Students will respect themselves and others, and will understand and appreciate diversity.
3. Students will respect themselves for their own health and wellness.
4. Students will learn to contribute as responsible citizens of the community, state, and nation.

Complex Thinkers

1. Students will gather and use information to gain new knowledge.
2. Students will support inferences and justify conclusions.
3. Students will utilize multiple strategies to solve a variety of problems.
4. Students will generate new and creative ideas in a variety of contexts.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Valley Junior High used effective collaborative efforts to develop a collective mission/vision for the school. The process of developing the school's mission began with several meetings with students, parents, faculty, and community members that began in the fall of 2004 and were completed in the winter of 2005. The faculty usually met on Fridays during an early release period for the students.

The faculty examined the mission statement that had been used for a 21st Century grant as a starting point to develop the school's current mission statement. The faculty gave recommendations and suggestions to improve the mission statement. A focus group that consisted of teachers, parents, and students was then set up to implement these revisions. Some focus group members were more involved than others due to various circumstances. One student was a vital participant in this process and suggested that the mission statement needed to be shorter and more concise. The final revised mission statement was presented to and voted on by the School Community Council and the faculty. All parties involved were in full agreement with this mission statement and its vision for the school.

The school's motto/slogan, P.R.I.D.E. (P: Productivity, R: Responsibility, I: Integrity, D: Diversity, E: Excellence) was developed and derived from Valley Junior High's mission statement. Most students know what the acronym P.R.I.D.E. stands for. Significant effort has made to let the student body know and learn the principles of P.R.I.D.E. This is evidenced by the many P.R.I.D.E. posters throughout the school, and by students' knowledge of the principles and teachers' belief in them (for example, one art class was designing P.R.I.D.E. posters for their teachers to put in their classrooms).

- b) *To what extent has the school defined as a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

Valley Junior High's belief statements reflect the school's dedication to student achievement and success. Each statement reflects the importance of student learning and applying this learning, and the need for students to be actively involved in their education. The belief statements also emphasize the need for a variety of instructional techniques, continuous assessment, and ongoing improvement. As the Visiting Team saw during its classroom visits, the teachers have attempted to implement these beliefs in their classrooms. They are trying to find ways to make learning meaningful and engaging, teach student responsibility, and increase effective decision-making.

Valley Junior High's teachers are very committed to student achievement and success. They reflect this commitment in their teaching practices and in their interactions with students. Until recently, with the assignment of the new Valley Junior High administrator, the administration's level of commitment to the belief statement was unclear. The current principal is very committed to these ideas and beliefs. The current assistant principal, however, did not have a high commitment level or an understanding of the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are directly aligned to the school's mission and belief statements. The school developed DRSLs through a multi-step, interdisciplinary process where teachers and departments examined and reviewed their curricula and determined what students should be learning. The teachers used the mission and belief statements as their guide when they began this process. The three DRSLs (Effective Communication, Responsible Citizenship, and Complex Thinkers) are simple, clear, and easy to remember. Each DRSL has good indicators that clearly define it.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

During the visit, the Visiting Team found evidence that the faculty at Valley Junior High is working collaboratively to ensure that the curriculum is based on the standards as defined by the Utah Core Curriculum. Several teachers have copies of the Utah Core Curriculum present in their classrooms, and mentioned that they refer to the core often in the departmental meetings as a way of maintaining continuity as a department. Teachers at this school have also gone through a curriculum mapping process. Through this process, several departments have identified the essential skills and standards that students need to learn. In many cases, irrelevant and ineffective curricula have been eliminated.

Teaming is in place for the school's entire 7th and 8th grade student body. It is evident that these teams are using their curriculum mapping and the Utah Core Curriculum in an effort to ensure that they are teaching with rigor and relevance. This school also has a school wide focus on the Six Traits of Writing. Six Traits of Writing posters are found throughout the building, and it is clear that the faculty as a whole has been trained on how to infuse writing into the curriculum. All teachers at Valley Junior High seek out professional development. The faculty also utilizes CRT and SAT test results as a way of monitoring how well they are teaching the core standards. Teachers are provided with time on an early release day for professional development and collaboration, and this time is being utilized.

While it is clear that the faculty has undergone extensive professional development and is utilizing methods to improve the curriculum, it became apparent that some of the newer faculty members had not undergone the same processes as the more experienced faculty. Although curriculum mapping is in place, formative common assessments would help this faculty to refine the curriculum further. The results from the NSSE surveys in the area of curriculum development show that more needs to be done to inform the school community about the professional development that the teachers are receiving.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of the curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The faculty at Valley Junior High has developed desired results for student learning that are comprehensive and have effective indicators. According to the Visiting Team's observations of how the curriculum was being presented to the students, many of the indicators were being utilized in the students' learning. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods to promote effective communication. The Visiting Team witnessed teachers utilizing group work, the use of technology, written thought, and verbal participation in their classroom. Teachers also utilized a variety of teaching methods for encouraging and teaching complex thinking. The Visiting Team heard several higher-ordered thinking questions and saw several teachers utilizing technology in their classrooms. Many teachers at Valley Junior High promoted all students participating in classroom instruction and did an effective job checking for student understanding. Teachers are utilizing best practices in the presentation of their curricula.

While it is clear that there are elements of Valley Junior High's DRSLs in the presentation of the curricula, the school's desired results for student learning and action plan need to become a driving force for future professional development.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

Several teachers said that they took summer workshops to help learn ideas that actively engage students. The district also offers many classes on this subject, and teachers were encouraged to participate in these classes. Most teachers participate in these classes. New teachers have mentors and are given time off to work with the mentors in their area. Many teachers take English classes to help ESL students. However, many ESL students are not succeeding, so this is an area of concern. One teacher mentioned that Hispanic students need a separate Spanish class, since their ability is much greater and they are able to progress more rapidly. When a class is a mixture of native-speaking and non-native-speaking beginners, these students do not perform up to their ability and become discipline problems.

The school profile indicated that, especially in language arts, economically disadvantaged students as well as ethnic minority groups have a low percentage of students who reach a level 3 or 4 on the CRT tests, particularly in the 9th grade. The 9th grade has an overall mastery rate of 64 percent, and ethnic minorities have a mastery rate of 37 percent. The economically disadvantaged students had a 50

percent mastery rate. This compares with 63 percent of the ethnic minority students who reach the 3 or 4 level in the 7th grade, so the 9th grade scores are significantly lower than the 7th grade scores.

Ninth grade students did much better in math, with 42 percent of the ethnic minority students reaching level 3 or 4 in 7th grade and 77 percent reaching level 3 or 4 in 9th grade. The economically disadvantaged students had a 69 percent mastery level in 9th grade. This compares with 88 percent of all students showing mastery. Science scores were more difficult to compare, but did not show as great a disparity as the language arts.

b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

The Visiting Team observed a variety of learning experiences actively engaging students, including:

- Videos and video clips, games, Socratic discussions, survival guides, hands-on construction projects, students making projects in art and cooking classes, PowerPoint presentations, use of overheads for assignments, tracking sheets, teacher use of microphones where acoustics are a problem, the day's outline listed, videotapes with packets of specific information to be gleaned from the tape or from lectures, and specific methods to use to study for tests.
- Ample evidence of technology use. Some of these included PowerPoint, keyboarding programs, a laptop lab for math and science, an overhead calculator, music being used in the classroom, and a computer lab in the media center.

c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Most teachers said that they took advantage of the TNT (testing and tutoring center). They place tests that students have missed or that they have the opportunity to retake in the testing center. In one class, the teacher said the test would be available for two weeks for retakes. The subjects tutored include mostly math, science, social studies, and English. Students are able to do make-up work for most other classes, but there are no specific tutors for those classes. Students are encouraged to consult with teachers before and after school for specific help with other subjects. Business partnership tutors help in the classroom, as well as labs and other activities.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Several teachers mentioned that the assessment tools used were mainly the CRTs and Iowa assessments. These tests are used in some classrooms effectively, but several teachers would like additional training on interpretation of data to help in their content areas. The Math Department has developed curriculum maps in which content is assessed on a quarterly basis by the teachers. The Fine Arts Department assesses as students progress on assignments. The Visiting Team would also suggest using the *Understanding by Design* model for assessment. Another area of improvement on assessment would be to include objectives in the lesson. Have these objectives stated and written so students know what is to be learned for the day, and then assess whether or not the objectives have been met at the end of the class.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

In the departmental teams, some use this time to develop and share test ideas, manipulatives, and strategies for curriculum delivery and assessment. In some of the departments, more time needs to be devoted to collaboration to assess data and develop curriculum maps and more frequent assessment of objectives to see if the standards are being met.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

There are several good things being accomplished at Valley Junior High. One of these is the TNT program. This allows flexibility for students coming in to make up a test and receive tutoring. Teachers also make time for students before and after school, and several teachers monitor their students' progress in an effective manner during class time. The Visiting Team did not view any teacher's assessments of daily objectives.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

One teacher summed it up best when she said, "Supporting an academic learning environment is just what Valley staff members do." Although there has been turnover in the administration over the last five years, teacher leadership has been in place and has fostered an academic learning climate. For example, the school

has implemented TNT, interdisciplinary teaming, block scheduling, flexible scheduling, and professional development; engaged business partners; reduced classroom interruptions; differentiated instruction; and honored student achievement.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision-making that is data-driven, research based, and collaborative?*

Teachers and parents were involved with decision making many years before the state required schools to have community councils for such things. This accreditation process was a vivid example of the staff coming together to review data- and research-based approaches to improvement and learning. The culture and climate at Valley Junior High are such that collaboration is just “what we do around here.”

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

Parents, students, and teachers receive academic data such as grades and CRT and Iowa assessment results. However, there is a perception by parents that the school does not provide them with enough information about how well their students are doing. In addition, several teachers told members of the Visiting Team that they have never seen CRT or Iowa data. Other staff members expressed a need for professional development on designing and utilizing formative assessments.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

It was evident to the Visiting Team that the school is safe in both the physical and emotional sense. Teachers stand at their doors between classes not only to supervise the students, but also to greet students as they come and go from class. Many teachers told the Visiting Team that in a short time, the newly appointed principal has developed a relationship of trust and has been very visible and involved in the management of students and providing leadership for learning. Unfortunately, the staff has very little confidence or trust in the assistant principal. This issue will need to be addressed following the district protocols and policies.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the schools goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

Although the principal has only been in place for two months, he has effectively streamlined resources and allocations with the school improvement plan, and ultimately student achievement.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The tradition at Valley is to empower teachers and shared responsibility and decision making. Even when the district rotates principals and assistant principals (more often than some teachers would prefer), the teacher leadership in the building provides stability. The members of the accreditation leadership team all told the Visiting Team that the newly appointed principal has provided a needed vision for the school and that he is committed to the school improvement plan and its action plan for improvement.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The school has a strong tradition of caring and respect. This is because faculty members have worked so closely with the students and developed good relationships. The school has strong community partners who support learning. This is demonstrated in their tutoring mentors for math and English, as well as their updated computer lab. The school has had several functions designed to include all ethnic groups. There is a large population of Hispanics at Valley but minimal to no representation of this group at PTA, C.C., SBO, Peer Group at PTC, and other functions. It is recommended that the school personally invite Hispanic parents to participate in various activities, and use the phone system to send messages in Spanish for those who need it. The Visiting Team would also recommend that the PTA receive training from the state PTA board on getting parents actively involved. The PTA parents who were part of the accreditation process were superb, but desire more assistance.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

It is obvious to the Visiting Team that Valley Junior High has worked to develop a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. A positive, nurturing environment for both students and teachers is evident. Teachers overwhelmingly stated that there is a climate for change and improvement in the academic curriculum. Several teachers believe that there needs to be more emphasis on academics, especially English, reading, and writing. Teachers do meet weekly to improve instruction and implementation and there appears to be a strong desire to do what is best for the students. Students, in turn, stated that teachers are always approachable and committed to helping students improve. The action plan identifies several areas for change and improvement. The staff members should

continue to look at specific steps for collecting data to verify their strategies, assure student learning, and promote continuous improvement.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical area for follow-up?*

The leadership team did an effective job of aligning the action plan with the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. Critical areas for growth and improvement are included in the action plan, with follow-up accountability in place.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

Most of the teachers the Visiting Team spoke with seemed committed to the action plan. There is also support at the district level and full support and commitment from the newly appointed principal. The Visiting Team reminds the school staff and the school leaders that they cannot waver in their commitment to the action plan.

- c) *How does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?*

The follow-up process seems to be in place.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the administration, faculty, and staff for completing the self-study in the appropriate manner, for being honest and up front with their data, and for collaborating to improve.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for the positive relationships that most teachers have with the students.
- The Visiting Team commends the total school staff for creating a physically and emotionally safe environment for students.
- The Visiting Team commends Valley Junior High for establishing and maintaining strong and viable business partnerships to enhance student learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for having a strong and effective comprehensive guidance program that includes a focus on one-on-one SEOPs, transitions from elementary school and to high school, and career and college planning.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for designing and implementing interventions to help students succeed, such as attendance tracking, TNT, YESS, SMART, A+, Comprehensive Guidance, and the interdisciplinary team.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration and teaching staff for implementing effective middle-level practices that support the success of the young adolescent, such as interdisciplinary teaming and the use of common planning time and flexible scheduling.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and faculty design and fully implement a comprehensive job-embedded professional development plan that fully aligns with the school's mission, beliefs, DRSLs, action plan, and these recommendations. The Visiting Team further recommends that this plan include the use of peer coaching as a means to embed and improve the elements of the PD plan.
- The Visiting Team recommends that specific professional development include strategies that address the needs of diversified learners such as ELLs, special education, gifted/talented, poverty, and ethnic minorities.

- With regard to action plan Goal 1 (core knowledge), the Visiting Team recommends that action steps be developed to specifically include a standards-based approach to identifying what students should know, understand, and be able to do. The unwrapped standards should drive what is taught and assessed. The following resources/approaches may be of benefit to the school for this process: Backward Design and the design of Power Standards/Big Ideas/Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions (see *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins and McTighe, and *Standards* by Reeves).
- With regard to action plan Goal 1, the Visiting Team recommends that content teams (departments) design and implement common formative assessments and consensus scoring at least quarterly, and that this data be used to drive instruction.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop a renewed focus and emphasis upon Community of Caring. It does not require extra funding to use the content to teach the five values. In addition, teen forums, parent forums, and service learning will help create a community within the school's new boundaries that accommodates an increased number of diversified learners.
- The Visiting Team reminds all the stakeholders of Valley Junior High that this is the *beginning*. The self-study is a means to improvement. The Visiting Team further reminds the school that the changes in store for Valley Junior High with regard to the new boundaries and the increased numbers of students that come from poverty and have other learning needs is not a problem, but rather an opportunity to build and develop a community of learners that will be successful and prepared for the future.